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ABSTRACT

The teacher education program at William Woods University (WWU) in central Missouri has developed five partnership projects that have served as the impetus for the gradual restructuring of the university's education program into a more holistic, interdisciplinary experience for the preservice teacher. This restructuring effort has blended professional development opportunities for K-12 educators and higher education faculty. The projects are: (1) an annual special education conference, which has been in place for 10 years, including a paraprofessional training segment introduced during the past two years; (2) two grants from the federal Eisenhower Professional Development Program to promote professional development in mathematics and sciences ("Mathematics and Science Teacher Education Resources" focusing on techniques for helping students, especially female students, in grades 3-8, and "Science and Math Are for Everyone" centering on incorporating technology into the teaching-learning process of both regular and special education science and mathematics curricula); (3) "Mid-Missouri Re:Learning Cluster" a collaborative effort between institutions of higher education and three central Missouri school districts; (4) a professional development school relationship with a local elementary school; and (5) the "Connection Project," a professional development effort funded by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and housed at WWU. (ND)

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Collaborating for Quality: Partnerships for Excellence through Education Reform

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Collaborating for Quality: Partnerships for Excellence through Education Reform

Background of Partnership Initiatives

Against a backdrop of sweeping statewide educational reform, William Woods University, a private, women-centered liberal arts institution in central Missouri, is developing partnerships for change in its teacher education program. In 1993, the Missouri legislature passed what is known to Missourians as the Outstanding Schools Act. The new law mandated, among other things, the development of rigorous academic performance standards, curriculum frameworks, and assessments. For practicing teachers in Missouri, this necessitated a strengthened commitment to ensuring that all students, including those at risk for academic failure, meet high expectations. For institutions of teacher education, it meant a reevaluation and, in many cases, a restructuring of pre-service training programs to ensure that future teachers are prepared to meet the challenge of moving diverse populations of students toward new academic standards.

During the past year, several projects at William Woods University have been continued, revisioned, and born. These projects form a variety of partnerships. As each of these projects has evolved, involved faculty members have come to realize that they had been working in isolation toward a common goal in the context of overall educational reform. These projects have served as the impetus for the gradual restructuring of the education program at the university into a more holistic, interdisciplinary experience for the pre-service teacher. Ultimately, this restructuring effort has blended professional development opportunities for K-12 educators and higher education faculty and has resultantly begun to create partnerships across the range of the educational community. Following is a brief description of these partnering efforts as they currently exist.

Partnership Initiatives

Annual Special Education Conference and Paraprofessional Training

In an effort to meet the inservice needs of educators and other human services professionals in the region, schools in Callaway County, Missouri, join forces annually to plan and host the Special Education Conference. This conference has been serving the needs of regional special educators for over ten years. Historically, it had been extremely difficult for small and/or rural schools in Missouri to stay abreast of changing practices and regulations in special education. However, the William Woods University Annual Special Education Conference has been providing a unique opportunity for the Department of Education at William Woods University to collaborate with local K-12 educators to meet the professional development needs of local education agencies.

The conference is planned by a committee consisting of the directors of special services from three county school districts, the superintendent from one district, the outreach director of Missouri School for the Deaf, and the William Woods University Department of Education faculty member who is responsible for the Special Education Certification Program. The specific format of the conference varies yearly, depending on the needs of local educators. The planning committee meets for a brainstorming session early in the fall to discuss dates, logistics, and possible presentation topics. The issues brought forth from this committee become the outline from which the conference is developed. Since its inception, the conference has included "hands-on" sessions facilitated by local teachers, discussions of current regulations and changes presented by State Department of Education officials, motivational seminars, and presentations of current research. Each year, some sessions are developed specifically for regular education administrators and teachers.

Two years ago, during its initial discussions, the Special Education Conference planning committee identified a need for paraprofessional training in special education. In order to meet this professional development need of area special educators, William Woods University students, under the direction and supervision of the William Woods University special education department, developed and presented information to paraprofessionals during fall 1994 and 1995 training sessions.

The overall effects of the Annual Special Education Conference and paraprofessional training are extensive. Both provide immediate professional development opportunities for local professionals and open the door for communication between William Woods University and local education agencies. They allow local school districts to express needs to an institution of higher education; the university can then, in turn, address these identified needs with students to better prepare them for their future roles as educators.

Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Training

The Department of Education at William Woods University has received funding from the federal Eisenhower Professional Development Program for two grants to promote professional development in mathematics and science education. The Eisenhower higher education grant competition funds professional development projects that address the needs of K-12 teachers in mathematics and science and which target historically under-served/under-represented student populations. The Eisenhower Programs at William Woods University have served teachers in public and private schools in the surrounding area and awarded participants graduate credit upon their completion of course requirements.

The first Eisenhower grant, *Mathematics and Science Teacher Education Resources (M.A.S.T.E.R.)*, focused on techniques for helping students (especially female students) in the third through eighth grade levels. Classroom teachers participated in summer sessions in 1993 and 1994 and a follow-up session in the fall semester to report on their experiences with the techniques and materials acquired in the previous summer. The *M.A.S.T.E.R.* Program presented hands-on activities to enhance instruction of science and math concepts. Forty area teachers participated each year of the *M.A.S.T.E.R.* Program.

Science and Math Are For Everyone was funded for 1995 and 1996. The specific instructional and content issues addressed in this project were the result of the collaborative planning for the annual, county-wide Special Education Conference. This committee's discussions regarding instruction of students with special needs and their inclusion in regular education mathematics and science classes indicated the importance of focusing this program on students with special needs and those who are at-risk of school failure. Instruction in the program is, therefore, centered around incorporating technology into the teaching-learning process of both regular and special education science and mathematics curricula.

Mid-Missouri Re:Learning Cluster

In 1994, William Woods University joined efforts with Central Missouri State University, Central Methodist College, the University of Missouri, Columbia, and three central Missouri school districts who were involved in Re:Learning initiatives in 1993-94 to form a Mid-Missouri Re:Learning Cluster. Each of the local school districts in the cluster is in the process of aligning with the Nine Common Principles developed and promulgated by Ted Sizer. The institutions of higher education are utilizing information from the participating K-12 schools to ensure that graduates of their teacher education programs are ready to assume roles as professional educators in restructured schools.

Initial cluster activities were funded by a $20,000 grant from the Southwestern Bell Foundation. These funds were used to develop a Team of Re:Learning Associates for Change (TRAC) group which provided the structure for application of the Nine Common Principles across cluster schools. The TRAC team has organized "critical friends" visits among cluster schools, as well as retreats to assist in developing a broad base of knowledge pertaining to systemic restructuring. Critical friends' visits have provided for a systematic and ongoing sharing of innovative ideas among cluster schools. They also allow for the identification of model classroom teachers and professors who demonstrate ongoing and successful applications of teaching strategies such as Socratic seminar, tutorials, interdisciplinary learning, and team teaching.

Retreats within the cluster have resulted in a cooperative effort to provide high quality workshops, seminars, and in-service opportunities that are far beyond those which individual school districts or institutions of higher education could make available. Involvement with K-12 educators provides higher education faculty with professional development opportunities in real life applications within public school classrooms, and conversely, involvement with higher education faculty provides K-12 educators with access to current research-based theories and practices.

As a part of this effort, William Woods University has designated one education faculty member who participates in all cluster activities and shares information with the rest of the education faculty. As a result of this work, instructional strategies in the University's classrooms are beginning to reflect characteristics of the Nine Common Principles. Additionally, the Education Department has begun a revision of curriculum and clinical experiences with the goal of facilitating each student's mastery of a limited number of well defined skills and areas of knowledge essential to successful teaching and learning. All work within the cluster allows for the development of truly seamless K-post-secondary education.

Creating a Professional Development School Relationship with a Local Elementary School

William Woods University is in the early stages of developing elements of the professional development school concept with Bush Accelerated Elementary School in Fulton, Missouri. Efforts began with a pilot project in January 1996. Because this is a pilot effort at this point, all student teachers are given the opportunity to select between participating as a student teacher in the professional development school setting and participating in a more traditional student teaching experience in another public school setting.

In the Bush Elementary setting, each student teacher works as part of a team with all the teachers within one grade level under the guidance of one lead teacher and in collaboration with a William Woods University education faculty member. The lead teacher is identified by consensus of the grade level teachers, the principal, the William Woods University faculty member working with that grade level, and the student teacher is also considered.

The basis for assessment of the student teacher's performance is the demonstration of the competencies outlined in the William Woods University Teacher Education Program Handbook. The grade level cadre confers with the student teacher and the university supervisor to determine the individual education plan which will be followed in order to insure that the competencies are demonstrated by the completion of the student teaching experience.

This new approach to student teaching placements has served to more fully integrate student teachers into the culture of the school. It has also allowed them to engage in a collaborative experience and to benefit from the professional expertise of an entire team of teachers and the pilot project has provided benefit to cooperating teachers because it has allowed them to do more team

teaching, collaboration, and peer observation, as well as engage in other kinds of professional development which will enable them to meet their own professional goals.

Initiation of the *Connections Project*

The *Connections Project* is a professional development effort funded by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and housed on the campus of William Woods University. *Connections* is designed to help school districts in Missouri meet a primary goal of the Outstanding Schools Act — making sure that **all** students are successful in school. *Connections* programs strive to bring together the efforts of educators, human services providers, and other community resources so that they may work collaboratively for the well-being of children and families in high-risk situations.

During the 1995-96 school year, the *Connections Project* is concentrating its efforts on five program components, all of which closely partner William Woods University Department of Education with local school districts and others interested in the well-being of children and families. The first of these is a pilot program which involves seven mid-Missouri school districts. Each district has identified a Leadership Cadre including the district administrator; a building principal, counselor, or special services coordinator; and a classroom teacher. Leadership Cadres participate in monthly training at William Woods University. Training is focused on identifying situations that place children at-risk within pilot communities; developing comprehensive, coordinated approaches to meeting the needs of all students; and linking schools effectively to community resources.

Each Leadership Cadre, in turn, is training a community team including parents, students, human services providers, and other community representatives, to collaborate to meet the needs of children and families. The goal of the *Connections Project* Pilot Program is to develop strong school/community partnerships that will build the capacity for integrated, school-linked services for students and their families and to develop diverse models for community collaboration that can serve as resources to other schools and communities.

The second program component that *Connections* has implemented during 1995-96 is the "Program Spotlights" professional development opportunities. Program Spotlights are monthly, regularly scheduled inservice opportunities for educators and other interested professionals throughout the region. All presentations are practitioner-provided to alert educators to the idea that they can easily access "experts" in a variety of areas within their own peer group. Programs are focused on identifying Missouri's promising practices in at-risk education, school-linked integrated services, and general education reform issues.

Connections' third program component is focusing on the use of technology to facilitate teachers' direct access to resources for children and their families. An online database of community resources is currently being developed for all counties in which a school district is participating in the pilot program. The database is being designed with the input of classroom teachers so they can easily access available resources to address issues arising in their own classrooms. Additionally, *Connections* is creating a collection of resources pertaining to at-risk education and school-linked integrated services in Dulany Library at William Woods University. All materials in the collection are included in the University's online card catalog, CLIO, and are available to any educator in Missouri through inter-library loan. These services, as well as other *Connections Project* program information, are accessible through the *Connections Project's* World Wide Web home page at http://www.oseda.missouri.edu/connections.

A fourth program component addresses the need for cross-training opportunities in teacher education programs at the university level. It is becoming increasingly important for teachers to be able to consider situations in their classrooms from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. To address this need, an interdisciplinary component was introduced into the seminar for new student teachers in the fall 1995 semester. During the seminar, student teachers worked in small groups to develop responses to classroom scenarios designed to elicit a multi-perspective discussion. They then presented their responses to a panel of experts from the legal, educational administration, social services, special education, medical, and juvenile justice fields. Panelists were asked to address each of the scenarios from the perspectives of their professions. Panelists ultimately reached consensus regarding "best practices" for each scenario.

Following are samples of scenarios that were addressed:

You have a child in your third grade classroom who seems to be having great difficulty in school. She constantly disrupts your lessons by talking, moving around the room, and creating distractions. In general, her academic progress has been poor. You feel that the child should be assessed for special services. You have contacted the child's parents, but they have declined to come to the school for a conference. They have told you that they do not see any behavior problems at home and have made it clear to you that they feel the child's poor academic progress is a result of your poor teaching. How would you handle this situation?

A child in your first grade classroom is frequently absent. When he does come to school, he is usually late. He almost always looks unkempt — his hair is uncombed, his clothes are dirty. He often appears to be tired, and you are sure he must be hungry, but he doesn't get to school in time for the breakfast program. You have tried unsuccessfully to contact his parents; the family does not have a telephone and notes you have sent home remain unanswered. How would you handle this situation?

Connections Project is currently compiling information from this seminar into an interdisciplinary resource booklet for new teachers. A draft of the resource booklet will be completed during the summer, and it will be reviewed by a broad representation of professionals, as well as by active classroom teachers. The resource booklet is being viewed as "work in progress" so that student teachers each semester can benefit from the experience of taking part in the panel discussion.

Also toward the goal of creating opportunities for cross-training in professional preparation programs, the *Connections Project* is working with the local county health department to develop a Family Resource Center which will potentially serve as a collaborative practicum site for both education and social work students at the University (the fifth program component). In September 1995, the staff of the *Connections Project* submitted a Delinquency and Youth Violence Prevention Program grant to the Missouri Department of Public Safety on behalf of the local county health department. This $59,000 grant is providing the impetus for the refurbishing of a former elementary building which will eventually house parent and family education programs, adult education programs, referral into community social services, youth recreation opportunities, and academic support programs. *Connections Project* staff members provide technical assistance in facilitating the development of a community collaborative effort that involves the local universities, the public schools, the Missouri School for the Deaf, community human services providers, churches, businesses, and other organizations.

Conclusion

Certainly, any one of these collaborative efforts is not enough to produce massive change. Taken together, as a multi-faceted collaborative approach, they appear to be altering the face of a very traditional teacher education program, and more importantly, they are serving the needs of in-service teachers who every day teach the children.